

***AMERICA'S PARTNERSHIP WITH NATIONS WITH STRONG
DEMOCRACIES***

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KATSINA - DECEMBER 9, 2009**

(as delivered)

Assalaamu alaykum. Barkanku da safe.

It is my honor to join so many distinguished individuals – academics, scholars, and religious community leaders, and students this morning.

It is also a pleasure to be back in Katsina again. I come at a time when I know your thoughts are with your President, the former Governor of Katsina, for whom this beautiful new university was named. Be assured that the people and Government of the United States of America share in your prayers and good wishes for his speedy recovery, as do I personally.

Therefore, it is a special privilege, to speak here this morning. The city of Katsina has its own proud history as a center for education, dating back through colonial rule when the first secondary school in the whole of northern Nigeria was established here. Even before that, Katsina and Daura are recognized everywhere as historic seats of Islamic culture and learning.

Just a few minutes ago, the Governor and I signed a Memorandum in which the U.S. Mission to Nigeria and Katsina State Government agreed to continue our discussions on ways to cooperate and expand projects in education, agriculture and health – including, in particular, assistance to help the University increase its books and resources in the library and access to information through technology resources. We live today in a global village – as we have so often heard – meaning we all need to work at being better global citizens. With programs like these, the American people are reaching out to establish links with states like Katsina to build bridges of mutual understanding and respect.

As President Obama has said during his speech in Cairo, America and the American people have embarked on a New Beginning not only with the Muslim world but with all diverse people of the world. Because, we, as Americans, must do several things better:

- We must respect our global neighbors, as I offer my respects to you here today;
- We must listen without arrogance or malice, so that our children can grow up in a peaceful and empowering environment;
- We must learn from one another, so that we can walk together and work together hand-in-hand;
- But most of all we must understand each other, so that your nation and my nation – meaning Muslim and Christian Nigerians as well as Muslim and Christian

Americans and all those around the world – can live in peace, harmony, and prosperity.

President Obama has often acknowledged the world's intellectual debt to Islam for its promotion of racial equality, its respect for other religions and for its historic contributions to education, innovation, science and medicine--things your University is beginning to be known for in Nigeria and in the U.S.

Based on these same ideals, President Obama promised in Cairo that the U.S. would pursue fresh partnerships with governments, citizens, community organizations, and with religious, business, and youth leaders in the areas of education, economic development, science and technology, and health. These same areas are the focus of the work that the U.S. Mission to Nigeria is doing to ensure we have *A New Beginning* here between the people of the United States of America and the people of Nigeria, in general, and in Katsina State in particular. My government has outlined what the *New Beginning* priorities are for Africa. They are:

- Promoting and strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law;
- Encouraging long-term development and growth;
- Assisting in the prevention and resolution of conflicts;
- Working closely together with African nations to address both old and new challenges.

In pursuing these goals, however, what is most important for us as Americans is to remember to listen and to learn from you – meaning the students, civil society, the press and our government partners. I am speaking here today in order to begin what I hope will be a growing dialogue between the U.S. and the citizens of Nigeria.

We all know that solutions to Africa's problems, helping the Continent to reach its full potential, won't come quickly or easily and must come from Africans themselves. The same thing rings true for Nigeria. However, I can today reaffirm the commitment of my government and the American people to work together with you under the U.S.-Nigeria Framework for Partnership under which the Memorandum I signed with your government falls, which will also assist in the areas of health, education, agriculture and much needed election reform. Overall, President Obama has promised that we would work with countries like Nigeria to strengthen democracy and governance; human rights, especially the rights of women; support religious freedoms; fight corruption, promote economic development, and enhance region-wide peace and security. Now, I want to say a little bit about the Niger Delta and your amnesty program. The international community has been pleased with the effort to date to try to restore peace in the region and we encourage movement on reintegration and rehabilitation so that there is a comprehensive approach to lasting stability in the area.

I have worked in Muslim countries from Sudan to Senegal and am committed to the same hopeful message articulated by President Obama - we want to build bridges of mutual understanding and respect, particularly with the Muslim world. Traveling in this country I have met with many Nigerians who hold similar views. Many of the goals, aspirations, and broad

visions for the future expressed by President Obama are things I know you also want for Nigeria – especially a government of, by and for the people, that respects the constitution, the rights of minorities and all religions, that is committed to combating corruption and willing to put the interests of the people above those of politics.

In the last two decades, dozens of African countries have embraced democratic rule by implementing electoral reforms, conducting free and fair elections and expanding the freedom of people to associate and discuss publicly what might be best for the future of their country. Passionate political debate is a necessary and a healthy sign of any mature democracy, and just such a debate is currently underway in Nigeria. In the newspapers, on television, in the chambers of government and on the streets, Nigerians are talking about their common future. The United States wishes you well in this dialogue, and we are confident that your laws, your Constitution, and your country's hard-won commitment to democracy will all ensure that Nigeria has a bright future. But keep in mind this is not easy.

A democratic government is one that strives to represent the best interests and goals of its people. President Obama has challenged leaders all over the world to abide by the highest standards of public trust (and I quote):

A government of the people and by the people sets a single standard for all who would hold power: You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy.

I have heard from Nigerians that these are your values as well. Although the words were said by the President of the United States, I believe we all can agree that they ring true for each and every person for every nation - and for each and every one of you who believes in the democratic experience.

Another important pillar of democracy involves fighting corruption. Money and power can corrupt even the best among us. According to the World Bank \$1 trillion dollars is paid every year around the world in bribes, and the United Nations has reported that over \$400 billion dollars has been looted from within Africa alone. This is public money -- your money, and money which is *not* spent on health care, education, roads or job creation; ...this is money *not* spent on improving the lives of those people that government claims to represent.

In Katsina, I know that your Government is doing wonderful things to address these key social sector issues. This new University and today's Memorandum of Discussion that your Governor and I have just signed are a testament to this commitment to democratic principles.

Another pillar of democracy, is respect for all religions. Nigeria is a religiously diverse nation with rich traditions from both the Muslim and Christian faiths. My President has stressed that "people in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the

persuasion of their minds, hearts and souls." There is a great deal of respect for religion in Nigeria – mosques and churches stand side by side in villages and towns, as Muslims and Christians study side by side in peace and harmony, underscoring the freedom of religion that is firmly anchored in your Constitution.

Last week, was Worlds AIDS Day and it was celebrated around the globe. The U.S. contributes enormously to HIV/AIDS programs here in Katsina and all throughout Nigeria with an annual contribution of over \$460 million.

In this region I know that agriculture is important, so I want to assure you that we have focused on that sector for Katsina under this new Memorandum of Discussion with your state government. My government has committed to providing over \$25 million each year to support food security programs in Nigeria and will be looking to enhance our agriculture programs in Katsina State under our food security efforts.

The strong friendship between the people of America and the people of Nigeria exists because we share common principles of justice and progress; tolerance and dignity; and respect and understanding. Through this partnership signed today we will continue to support you here in Katsina and throughout Nigeria, as you-- a diverse people --work to strengthen your democracy and institute election reforms , as we count on you to hold free and fair elections in 2011, and rely on your constitution and your constitutional processes especially during difficult times.

Again, for the students here today, I wish you well in your studies and I look forward to this new partnership we have with the University. I also look forward to our enhanced work in health and agriculture here in this great state of Katsina. I restate my prayers for a speedy recovery of your President and I leave you today with best wishes for the nation.

Thank you!

Shuk-ran, Nagode.